

# Green schoolyards offer physical and mental health benefits for children

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A growing body of evidence supports the claim that access to safe, natural areas improves health across a wide variety of areas, including heart health, mental health, weight management, ADHD, and stress among children. A concept gaining momentum in this realm is green schoolyards. But what is a green schoolyard?

A research abstract, "Green Schoolyards Support Healthy Bodies, Minds and Communities," that explores the concept of a green schoolyard will be presented Saturday, Sept. 16 at the American Academy of Pediatrics National Conference & Exhibition in Chicago.

"Green schoolyards can include outdoor classrooms, native gardens, storm water capture, traditional play equipment, vegetable gardens, trails, trees and more," says Stephen Pont, MD, MPH, FAAP, medical director, Dell Children's Texas Center for the Prevention & Treatment of Childhood Obesity and Assistant Professor of Pediatrics, UT-Austin Dell Medical School. "And outside of school time, these schoolyards can be open for the surrounding community to use, benefitting everyone."

Green schoolyards offer an opportunity for [children](#) to experience a healthy outdoor environment as part of their daily lives. After school hours, they provide value to the entire community through improved health, higher rates of community and family engagement, and increased opportunities for active outdoor play and relaxation.

"Too many children have no access to quality school grounds. In many

neighborhoods, the standard play space is a barren asphalt playground or a concrete slab surrounded by chain link fence—a completely unsuitable environment for children's play." says Richard Louv, Co-Founder of the Children & Nature Network.

For this study, researchers summarized the peer-reviewed scientific literature documenting green schoolyard benefits to academic outcomes, beneficial play, physical activity, and [mental health](#). To date, the research on the benefits of green schoolyards has enabled 5 cities to implement such projects in collaboration with the Children & Nature Network and the National League of Cities. These include Austin, Texas; Grand Rapids, Mich.; San Francisco, Calif.; Providence, R.I.; and Madison, Wis.

"So many physicians and health professionals choose to spend their free time in nature, but we often forget that nature can be a powerful [health](#) intervention for our patients, both for the prevention and improvement of many medical conditions," says Dr. Pont. "We should all be champions for kids and families getting more Vitamin N."

**More information:** Abstract Title: Green Schoolyards Support Healthy Bodies, Minds and Communities

Provided by American Academy of Pediatrics

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